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# IS SUFFICIENT TIME DEVOTED TO THE STUDY OF GOVERNMENT IN OUR COLLEGES?

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A few years ago a committee was appointed by the American Political Science Association to investigate the teaching of American Government in the secondary schools of the United States. The circular letter sent out by this committee contains the following observation:

Is it not a curious fact that though our schools are largely instituted and operated by the government, yet the study of American government in the schools and colleges is the last subject to receive adequate attention? The results of the neglect of this important branch of study in our educational institutions can easily be seen in the general unfitness of men who have entered a political career, so that now the name of statesman is often used as a term of reproach, and the public service is weak, except in a few conspicuous instances. Are the schools perhaps to blame for the lack of interest in politics shown by our educated men until recent exposures arrested the attention of the entire nation?

We think the best place to begin the work of regeneration and reform is in the American secondary schools and colleges. Here we find the judges, legislators, diplomats, politicians and office-seekers of the future in the making. Here are the future citizens, too, in their most impressionable years, in the years when the teacher has their attention.<sup>1</sup>

The committee found as a result of the investigation then instituted that only from 17 to 20 out of 100 students in the high schools take American Government and that according to indications the percentage was decreasing. Large cities were found where American government was not taught at all in the high schools. It was found that the amount of energy put forth to comprehend the language of the ancient Romans was about three times the total amount devoted

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of the American Political Science Association*, vol. v, p. 221.

to the comprehension of our vast and very intricate governmental and party machinery. It seemed very singular to the committee, "that in our high schools where the most fortunate tenth or twentieth of our youth is being educated at public expense, the subject of government should receive so little attention and be among the poorest taught in the entire curriculum."<sup>2</sup> It was a question in the opinion of the committee whether it is more important that the future American citizen should be able to translate the language of the ancient Romans and talk learnedly of ephors, areopagus, praetors and consuls than that he should know how our candidates are nominated, how our citizens are governed, how our senators are elected, how our juries are drawn, and how our national and state courts are constituted.

Believing that the inadequate amount of time devoted to the study of government in the secondary schools and the very unsatisfactory character of the instruction is due, at least in part, to a failure to place sufficient emphasis upon this subject in American colleges, the writer was led to a comparative study of the courses offered in Political Science and Government in a selected list of colleges of the United States. The catalogues of more than sixty institutions were examined. In the preparation of data, however, the older universities of the East and the large state universities of the Middle West, and the colleges and universities of the South were not included—the former on account of the fact that their departments were too extensive and too highly specialized to be used in making comparisons, and the latter because of the undeveloped condition of this department of work. Forty institutions were finally chosen as a basis for comparative study.<sup>3</sup>

Although this is a small portion of the total number of colleges in the country it is believed that the list is representative enough to

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 226.

<sup>3</sup> In all but a few instances the catalogues for year ending June, 1910, were used. The catalogues of the following institutions were selected in preparing data: Amherst, Bowdoin, Bryn Mawr, Clark, Colorado, Dartmouth, Dickinson, Grinnell, Haverford, Knox, Lehigh University, Oberlin, Ohio Wesleyan, Olivet, Pennsylvania State, Rutgers, Smith, Swarthmore, Trinity, Tufts, Union, Ursinus, Vassar, Wesleyan University, Williams, Whitman, and the Universities of Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Southern California, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington, Wyoming.

form a fairly accurate estimate of the time devoted to the study of government in our higher institutions. The major portion of the list is comprised of the large and richly endowed colleges of the United States and the liberal arts department of twelve state universities. As the number of courses offered in the state universities is frequently larger than the number of those offered in the private institutions of the East and as the institutions of the South are not included it may fairly be concluded that the general averages secured are more favorable to the subject of government than would be the case if statistics were gathered from a much larger number of colleges and universities from all sections of the United States.

### *History*

	PER CENT*	HOURS†
Ancient.....	50	53
Mediaeval.....	87.5	107½
Modern European.....	87.5	126½
American.....	97.5	170½
English.....	87.5	106

### *Political Science and Government*

	PER CENT	HOURS
Political Science or Comparative Government.....	72.5	55
American Government.....	50.2	38
American Politics.....	17.2	8
Political Theories.....	30	18½
American Constitutional History.....	20	14
English Constitutional History.....	10	5½
Municipal Government.....	45	24½
American Diplomacy.....	15	10

### *Law.*

	PER CENT	HOURS
American Constitutional.....	35	24½
Elementary Law and Jurisprudence.....	32.5	26
International.....	42.5	29½
Commercial.....	17.5	12

\*Percentage of institutions offering course.

†A unit hour—one hour per week throughout the year.

*Economics*

	PER CENT	HOURS
Elements.....	95	91
Public Finance.....	80	60½
Money and Banking.....	70	52½
Economic Theory.....	42.5	35
Economic History.....	72.5	72
Labor Organizations.....	57.5	43½
Trusts and Industrial Combinations.....	42.5	42
Transportation.....	55	40
Statistics.....	20	8½

*Sociology*

	PER CENT	HOURS
Elements.....	32.5	41
Advanced Sociology.....	20	17½
Charities.....	22.5	16
Socialism.....	17.5	11
Social Psychology.....	10	9½

Information from catalogues is sometimes indefinite and not always reliable enough to form a very accurate basis for statistical results. All that can be claimed for the data gathered is that general tendencies are rather clearly shown and a fair estimate can be formed of the amount of time given to the study of government in the colleges of the country.

It will be seen from the above table that only 50.2 per cent of the list of colleges chosen offer courses in American Government. Including the number of hours devoted to American Politics only 46 hours per year are given altogether to the study of our governmental system in these forty institutions of the country. The time devoted to American Constitutional History and Constitutional Law and in some cases to American History may be claimed, as given, in part at least, to American Government. After making allowance for the emphasis upon government in the study of history the total time allowed to this subject is very small indeed in comparison with other related subjects. For example, fully as much time is given to the study of the governments of ancient Greece and Rome as to our own system. In fact, if the courses offered in the department of Classics

were added the preponderance would be distinctly in favor of the ancient governmental systems. Practically as much time is given to the study of the intricate and rather special problems of transportation as to separate courses in American Government. Such subjects as labor problems and trust problems have a larger total than American Government.

Another interesting feature of the data secured is the fact that only 26 hours are allotted to the Elements of Law and Jurisprudence in the 40 institutions selected. A few more than two-thirds of these institutions offer no course at all in Elementary Law. If the total number of hours given to Political Science, Government and Law be divided by the total number of institutions, it is found that less than 7 hour per week for each institution are devoted to the field which aims to give our students a definite knowledge of our governmental and legal system, in its origin, development and practical working. Fully one-half of this total of 7 hours deals with the historical development of our institutions and with political theory, leaving less than 4 hours per week throughout the year for an analysis of the governmental organization at the present time and to the study of practical problems of modern politics. One hour weekly is the average time given in each of the 40 institutions to the definite study of American Government. When it is recognized that a large portion of the total number of hours is to be found in a few well-organized and well-endowed institutions and the state universities, the actual time devoted to this field in the majority of the colleges of the country appears to be exceedingly small.

An analysis of the courses offered according to college catalogues gives no indication in regard to the number of students enrolled in the classes in Political Science, Government and Law. As these courses are very rarely required and are elected as a rule mainly by those majoring in the department, it is safe to presume that only a small percentage of those graduating from college get any training in this field. If the figures secured from the enrollment of classes in three of these institutions may be taken as typical, from 80 to 90 per cent of the students graduating from our institutions leave college without any special training for citizenship or for the assumption of leadership in matters relating to law, government and politics.

The above data and the observations which may be drawn therefrom are not intended to be either very accurate or very conclusive. They are offered primarily to show the need of further investigation

and the absolute necessity of a better development of work along these lines in American colleges.

It is generally recognized that in no other country of the world is the citizen and voter called upon to do so much as in the United States. In the adoption of constitutions, in the election of hosts of public officials, in determining the great policies of national and state governments our voters are constantly called upon to decide an increasing number of political issues. As these issues have grown in number and importance they have also grown in complexity. The adoption of the initiative, referendum and recall and the enactment of extremely elaborate state constitutions are imposing heavier and heavier burdens upon the electorate.

In like manner our country has been foremost in placing emphasis upon education as the prime requisite for the development of good citizenship. Our public school leaders and those in charge of the curricula of our higher institutions have in theory at least claimed that intelligent citizenship is one of the aims constantly kept in view. Is it not strange, then, that so little time, thought and energy are given to the study of the field of American Government and Politics in our secondary schools and colleges? And how does it happen that in the instruction offered such a small percentage are actually enrolled? Can a nation whose government is constructed on the principle that the people shall rule afford to devote from three to four times as much energy upon the study of the classic languages, making them the basis of the superstructure of higher education, and fail to find time or opportunity to present the principles and practices of its own governmental system except to a small minority of those who benefit by our higher educational institutions?

It is certainly significant that the majority of the great movements for good government and progressive changes in government, such as the application of business principles to American municipalities through bureaus of municipal research and the fruitful developments in the field of comparative legislation in legislative reference libraries, have originated with private individuals and associations and have only been tardily recognized and sanctioned by our higher institutions. Is it not probable that one of the causes which have led to so much unscientific legislation in relation to money and industry in the United States is the inherent distrust of the expert fostered in the minds of those who have had little or no opportunity to master the first principles of subjects with which they are obliged to deal?

The actual status of courses offered in law and the opportunity for instruction in this subject is also a matter for serious reflection. In a nation where the citizens are called upon to take such a large part in the law-making process it is not a little surprising that such a small amount of attention has been given to the study of law by those who are not looking forward to the profession of practicing attorney. Fortunately for our country, lawyers were given from the beginning the supreme function of interpreting our law and a dominant voice in its making, due to the fact that our legislatures were filled almost exclusively with those who at one time or other had received training in law school or office. But times have changed, and lawyers now comprise a much smaller portion of those placed in responsible government positions and the average citizen is called upon frequently to determine questions primarily legal in nature. Greater responsibilities have been thrown upon those who are not lawyers or who have had no training even in the elementary principles of law. It is natural to ask what is being done to prepare citizens for this greater responsibility.

The average business man is called upon to deal constantly with questions that involve important issues of law. In most cases experience has shown that his only safe guide and counsellor is the reliable lawyer. But why should the business man have no opportunity to receive such training as would give him an insight into the elementary principles and the ordinary procedure of the legal code by which he is governed? Is it not as important that a man should know the elementary rules which determine the making of a contract, the employment of an agent, or the acquisition and control of property as it is that he should know the precise conjugation of French verbs or the plan of Alexander's campaigns? Yet the latter are looked upon as extremely essential in a liberal arts education, while the former is left to be gathered through the mistakes and errors of costly experience in life.

If the United States is to fulfil the prediction of Ex-President Eliot and become the most democratic of all democratic countries of the world, it would appear axiomatic that in its educational system there must be found place for the most thorough-going study of the principles and practices of modern governments and an accurate and painstaking analysis of our own system in its historical evolution, its present working and future possibilities. It would seem that if modern democratic devices are to result in great good to the community,



a larger proportion of our future citizens should receive training in the elementary principles of law. All cannot become government experts, nor can we hope to avoid the myriads of mistakes and misunderstandings which lead to endless litigation, but at least we can so provide that the simple mistakes due to profound ignorance on matters pertaining to government can in part be alleviated, and the superstitious awe, reverence and fear with which anything pertaining to law so often appears enshrouded can be slightly dispelled.

There are indications that the study of American Government will soon be advanced in dignity to a position where it may well deserve a place in every college curriculum instead of being relegated to the elementary school as a part of a course in "Civics." Secondary schools and colleges are becoming aware of the deficiencies in the courses which train for the highest responsibilities of citizenship. Some of our great universities in their highly developed departments of Political Science are attempting to remedy this apparent defect in our educational system. A few colleges have realized the need and their well organized departments are models which other colleges might do well to follow. The state universities in their rapid recognition of the possibilities in this field are setting a standard for the higher institutions of the country. They are impressing anew upon educational leaders the fact that colleges and universities have other responsibilities than the training of doctors, lawyers, preachers and teachers or the older type of cultured gentleman. These responsibilities are summed up in duties to the community and the nation at large; duties which make it incumbent upon every institution deserving the name college to aid progressively in the development of a more effective type of citizenship supported and strengthened not only by a knowledge of government in its historical evolution and present form of organization but also by an intimate acquaintance with the practical operation of modern political institutions.